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Aims of January 18 - 25 Prayer Week Clarified

(Geneva) - In a letter going out with the annual call to prayer for Christian unity issued by the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches, Dr. Oliver Tomkins, Bishop-elect of Bristol, England, chairman of the Commission's Working Committee, describes the aims of the observance, January 18 - 25.

The letter makes two points "which may perhaps remove some uncertainties" and distinguishes the World Council's Week of Prayer for Christian Unity from the World's Evangelical Alliance Week of Prayer and from Roman Catholic intercession for return to the See of Rome.

Emphasizing that there is no necessary conflict in spirit or practice between the WCC's week and the week of "united prayer for the evangelization of the world" promoted earlier in January by the Evangelical Alliance, Dr. Tomkins stresses that the WCC week is specially concerned with prayer for unity. "Unity and mission are so closely related", he says, "that we ought to find no conflict in the spirit of the two weeks, though it must be admitted that this nearness does, in some quarters, create real problems of a practical and organizational kind. But these have to be sorted out at the local level."

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The bishop-elect lists "another confusion" as being "between the observance of this week in the spirit and approach of the Abbé Couturier (whose outlook was one which the Faith and Order movement shared when it adopted the promotion of this week in 1940) and an interpretation of it as prayer simply for the reconciliation of all other Christians to the Roman Catholic Church".

The late Abbé Paul Couturier of Lyon, France, promoted prayer during the week for "the unity which Christ wills, in His way and at His time". (See EPS below)

United prayer for Christian unity at Whitsunday each year was encouraged by the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches from 1920 onward. In 1941 the observance was transferred to the third week of January. It now coincides with the season adopted in 1935 by the Abbé Couturier.

The full text of Dr. Tomkins' letter is on page 10 of EPS. EPS, Geneva

Couturier Movement of Prayer for Unity Grows

(Lyon, France) - Literature for use during the week of Prayer for Christian Unity, January 18 - 25, is again being sent out in large quantities to many countries by Father P. Michalon, successor to the late Abbé Paul Couturier.

A widening circle within the Roman Catholic Church and in other Christian confessions now uses material sent by the "Lyon movement" to aid intercession. This year similar prayers have been issued by Father Michalon's collaborators and the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches.

This year's preface in English for the suggested prayers to be used during the week stresses that "this is not a question of unity by reduction, arrived at by the minimum of common faith, but it concerns the unity for which Christ prayed, and continues to pray eternally; for any other unity would be a betrayal of the Truth, a betrayal which every Christian rejects with horror".

The movement begun by the Abbé Couturier prays for unity to be given to all Christians in accordance with the will of Christ for His Church, "in His way, by His means, when He wills". By avoiding a form of prayer that "prejudges the issue" and asks for reunion of all Christians with the Roman Catholic Church, the Couturier movement provides a means whereby Roman Catholics and non-Roman Catholics can pray together for unity without offence to conscience or conviction.

This year's literature draws attention to the sending out for last year's observance of over 450,000 items of literature to more than forty countries. Special broadcasts were made from Radio Dakar and Radio Monte Carlo. Circulation of brochures showed a spectacular increase in England and Holland. Ecumenical exhibitions were held in some local centres.

Father Michalon's appeal has again this year suggested common appeals by Roman Catholics and Protestants to help the poor. The idea as originally put forward by Professor Oscar Cullmann of Basel, was that Protestant parishes should help groups of Roman Catholics in need, and vice versa.

Prayer cards, posters, brochures and other materials in English are sent out by Father P. Michalon, Directeur, Séminaire Universitaire, Place Abbé-Larue, Lyon (5e).

EPS, Geneva

Italy's Courts Concede More Religious Liberty

(Rome) - Italy's Constitutional Court has ruled that evangelical congregations are free to open church buildings or other places of public worship without advance government authorization.

The court also said that it was unnecessary to inform the police before conducting worship or to have government approval for the appointment of a pastor.

The articles of a law passed in Italy in 1929 and 1930, calling for the authorizations declared unnecessary by the court, were said to be illegal under Italy's new constitution, which guarantees religious liberty.

The case was brought before the court by Pastor Francesco Rauti of the Assemblies of God. EPS, Geneva

US Churchmen Back Recognition of China

(Cleveland) - A statement backing US recognition of China, ~~was~~ unanimously adopted on November 21 by 500 delegates to a World Order Study Conference sponsored by the National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA.

The statement, adopted at the end of the four-day conference, said that "with reference to China, Christians should urge reconsideration by our Government of its policy in regard to the People's Republic of China. While the rights of the people of Taiwan and of Korea should be safeguarded, steps should be taken toward the inclusion of the People's Republic of China in the United Nations and for its recognition by our Government. The exclusion of the effective government on the mainland of China, currently the People's Republic of China, from the international community, is in many ways a disadvantage to that community. It helps to preserve a false image of the United States and of other nations in the minds of the Chinese people. It keeps our people in ignorance of what is taking place in China. It hampers negotiations for disarmament. It limits the functioning of international organizations. We have a strong hope that the resumption of relationships between the peoples of China and of the United States may make possible also a restoration of relationships between their churches and ours!"

In its statement, the conference said that "we should welcome the fact that the world is not divided into two solid political blocs. The effort of our own Government to drive every nation into one bloc or the other has been as mistaken as it has been unsuccessful!"

The statement also pointed out that we should avoid the posture of general hostility to Communist nations and "cease the practice of continual moral lectures to them by our leaders".

The 5,000-word "Message to the Churches" of the conference also called for the churches to work for school integration in the United States, endorsed disarmament conferences as essential to the continuing process of building world law and order, assailed the theory of "limited" wars and said that new weapons made it even more imperative to have war prevention rather than war limitation.

In New York last week, Dr. Ernest A. Gross, former ambassador to the United Nations, who headed the conference, said that the delegates had in no way implied that they represented the unanimous sentiment of Protestant leaders in the United States.

The Rev. Norman Vincent Peale, well-known New York preacher and writer, had said that he wanted to repudiate the action of "a small group, who presuming to speak for the entire Protestant Church, issued a resolution favouring recognition of Red China and its admission to the United Nations". The action has also been attacked by the Council Against Communist Aggression located in Philadelphia, and the Rev. Daniel A. Poling, editor of The Christian Herald.

Speakers at the conference included Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, Methodist Bishop G. Bromley Oxnam, Professor D.R. Fleming of Vanderbilt University and Dean John C. Bennett of Union Theological Seminary. EPS, Geneva

French Rural Churches Confer

(Athis-de-l'Orne, France) - A three-day conference for Protestant rural pastors and agricultural experts, meeting on November 24 - 26, has studied France's rural problems in the light of the Christian faith.

The conference, called by the ten-year-old National Protestant Bureau of Rural Studies, concentrated on questions of rural evangelism.

In an introductory survey, Pastor Gerard Cadier of the Department of the Drôme described the "de-christianization from the inside" that is eating into many traditionally Protestant rural parishes in France because of the failure of Christian communities to make an appeal to youth. He said that a double attack on the problem was needed: dealing with social problems by the "spiritual amelioration of whole villages or regions", and individual conversion within this setting.

Representatives of various regions described work in progress in areas of Protestant strength: lectures and meetings for training in Christian rural action in Alsace; "rural days" and advance training for student pastors in Normandy; follow-up of last year's "Kirchentag" rally in Strasbourg; rural meetings in the Lozère district; special meetings and camps in the Drôme and Isère valleys.

Professor Bergman of the French National Institute of Agronomy, surveyed social problems in French rural life. He called for more flexibility in patterns of inheriting land and for cooperative farming of adjacent properties to get the best results from available resources.

During an evening session participants saw colour pictures of floods that recently ravaged the strongly Protestant valley of the River Gard in Southern France.

In a closing session the rural representatives reviewed the results of the proposed European Common Market and were told in a speech by M. Raoul Browne, that long-range attack on the problems of the farmer in underdeveloped areas depended on the success of regional arrangements like European Economic Cooperation. The discussion centred on ways of supplementing emigration by qualified Catholic farmers to underdeveloped areas by sending trained groups of Protestant farmers to render Christian service. EPS, Geneva

Glasgow Presbytery Rejects Anglican-Presbyterian Report

(Glasgow) - The influential Church of Scotland Presbytery of Glasgow has rejected by a large majority the 1957 joint report on future relations between Presbyterian and Anglican churches in the United Kingdom.

The report, which recommended mutual recognition of Bishops by Presbyterian churches and of presbyteries by Anglican churches has been much debated in Scotland and was referred to presbyteries for comment by the Church of Scotland's General Assembly. (See EPS No. 23)

A recommendation of the Glasgow Presbytery's sub-committee, set up to deal with the report, said that the door should be kept open for future conversations between the two types of churches, but on a new basis that left room for "full and mutual recognition of the ministries of the conferring churches".

The Glasgow criticisms of the report concentrated on fears that only episcopally ordained ministers could be regarded by Anglican churches as truly valid and regular. The Presbytery's sub-committee emphasized that, while the Church of Scotland accepted the validity of Anglican orders, it was convinced of the full apostolic validity of the ordination of its own ministers by presbytery.

EPS, Geneva

Canadian Anglicans to Re-Open Union Discussion

(Toronto, Canada) - The Church of the Province of Canada (Anglican) is to renew discussions of possible union with the United Church of Canada.

At a meeting of the Anglican Church's Executive Council it was decided to hold a combined meeting of the church's House of Bishops and its Reunion Committee, which was appointed fifteen years ago to consider the possibilities of church union.

The Anglican Church's action follows a recent request from the United Church, formed in 1925 by a merger of Methodists, Presbyterians and Congregationalists. The United Church's General Council asked the Anglicans to say whether they desired to continue or discontinue union conversations. (See EPS No. 36)

EPS, Geneva

Philippine Protestants Attack "Luther" Ban

(Manila) - The two-year old ban on the commercial showing of the film, "Martin Luther", in Filipino theatres has again been attacked by the president of the Philippine Federation of Christian Churches, Dr. Gumersindo Garcia.

The federation wants to use the film to help in raising part of the \$5,000 Protestant quota for the tenth World Jamboree of Boy Scouts which will be held in the Philippines.

In writing to Philippine President Carlos P. Garcia, Dr. Garcia said that "we are requesting you to allow us to show this film in a commercial movie house because in our experience showing it in Protestant churches where facilities are very limited is never satisfactory. We are also making this appeal to you because of the belief that we have been greatly discriminated against."

EPS, Geneva

National YMCA Congress Held in Portugal

(Coimbra) - A national congress of the YMCAs of Portugal has been held for the first time in many years, attended by delegates from the YMCAs in Lisbon, Porto and Coimbra.

Dr. Luiz Henrique da Silva of Porto was elected president of the national alliance and Jaime Perreira of Lisbon was named president of the national council.

The YMCAs in Brazil and Portugal have been working together for several years, and a fraternal worker from Brazil, Dr. Silas Raeder, who has been working in Portugal for the last year and a half, is the only professional YMCA secretary in the country. The Brazil YMCA is now planning to send Mr. Erasmo Chavez to Portugal for a three-year term, while the Portuguese associations will pay his travel and other expenses. EPS, Geneva

New Protestant Contacts in Cameroons

(Yaounde) - Pastor Francois Akoa, general secretary of the Presbyterian Church in the Cameroons, travelled in early November for eight days in the mission territory of the neighbouring Council of Baptist and Evangelical Churches in the Cameroons. He was invited by the Baptist and Evangelical Council and accompanied by its general secretary, Pastor J. Kotto.

At the end of the tour Pastor Akoa said he hoped the contacts made would be renewed and that if the Baptists wanted unity this would benefit the whole Protestant family in the Cameroons, which had to be united to be strong and active. EPS, Geneva

All-Africa Christian Organization Emerges

(Yaounde, Cameroons) - A meeting of the continuation committee of the Ibadan All-Africa Christian Conference formed last January (see EPS Nos. 3 and 4) met at Brazzaville, French Equatorial Africa, in the first week of November and was attended by members from as far distant as Madagascar and Natal, represented by the author Alan Paton.

The ten members of the committee, with Sir Francis Ibiam of Nigeria in the chair, decided to set up a permanent secretariat and appoint a travelling secretary who will visit Christian councils and churches.

Five conferences will be held in five regions of Africa south of the Sahara as preparation for a second All-Africa Christian conference at a date to be fixed later. EPS, Geneva

Professor Freytag Asks Understanding of Chinese Church

(Frankfurt-am-Main, Germany) - Professor Walter Freytag, well-known German missionary leader, has urged that "the West should overcome its prejudice against the Chinese Church".

In a report on his visit to China last year he told a study conference organized at Arnoldshain by the Mission Centre of the regional Church of Hessen-Nassau that the Chinese Church definitely wanted to be "the Church of Jesus Christ" and at the same time to cooperate actively in building up Communist China.

Professor Freytag said the Christian minority in Communist China certainly faced problems, but their services were surprisingly well attended. He asked people in the West not to condemn the Chinese Church. EPS, Geneva

In Brief

The cornerstone for the new Evangelical Church in Volos, Greece, was laid on November 26. The church is being rebuilt after its destruction during a 1955 earthquake. Presiding at the ceremony was the Rev. Stylios Kaloterakis, new moderator of the Greek Evangelical Church, who was elected at the meeting of the church's triennial synod in October.

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Reprints of the last sermon preached by the Rt. Rev. G.K.A. Bell, former Bishop of Chichester and honorary president of the World Council of Churches, on August 24 at Odense, Denmark, at a service marking the tenth anniversary of the WCC, are available from Publications Officer, World Council of Churches, 17 route de Malagnou, Geneva, Switzerland. The sermon was published in The Ecumenical Review and the price is 90 Swiss centimes. Bishop Bell died on October 3.

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An average of nearly 14 million Scriptures in more than 270 languages were distributed annually during the last five years in the United States and overseas by the American Bible Society.

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Two American churchmen have been honoured by the West German government. A Lutheran layman, Dr. Clarence C. Stoughton, president of Wittenberg College in Springfield, Ohio, has been awarded the Grand Cross of the Order of Merit and Professor Frank Lättele of Atlanta University has received the Distinguished Service Cross of the Order for promoting understanding and friendship between Americans and Germans.

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The millionth copy of the Bible has been placed in a British hotel by the Gideons since the organization was started in the United Kingdom in 1949. The Gideons, who number 20,000, are active in 26 countries.

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The tenth World Congress for Christian Youth, sponsored by Youth for Christ, will be held on January 4 - 10 in Madras, India. Speakers will include Dr. Robert Pierce, president of World Vision, and the Rev. Joe Blinco, English associate evangelist in the Billy Graham team.

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The tenth anniversary of the arrival of a group of eighty Mennonite families in Uruguay was celebrated on October 26. Resettled by the Mennonite Central Committee, the families had been living in Holland as refugees. During the celebration a new church was opened by the groups.

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Two reports of conferences held in Japan this summer have just been issued by the World Council of Christian Education and Sunday School Association. They are the "Report of the World Institute on Christian Education" and "Training Ministers for a Teaching Ministry". More than 260 Christian educators from 58 countries attended the seminar on Christian education held at Seiwa and Kobe Colleges in Japan. The seminar on the ministry was held in Tokyo and attended by sixty persons, representing 36 theological seminaries.

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A resolution urging President Eisenhower to call a national conference on racial integration as soon as possible was passed by delegates from 220 councils of United Church Women meeting in Denver, Colorado. In other action, the women

went on record as supporting civil rights and integration legislation, proposed "more effective enforcement of civil rights legislation by the executive branch of the government" and asked for controlled nuclear weapons testing.

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The German ambassador in London, Baron Hans von Herwarth, has bestowed the Grand Cross of the Order of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany, with ribbon and star, on the widow of the late Bishop G.K.A. Bell. It was meant for the bishop, who died before it could be conferred, and was awarded for his long work towards Anglo-German understanding.

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As a result of an appeal for victims of the flood disaster in the Gard river valley in southern France, the Roman Catholic weekly Témoignage Chrétien received 600,000 French francs (\$1,450) from its readers. The paper, as previously announced, sent half the sum raised to Pastor Marc Boegner, president of the French Protestant Federation, to be used to help Protestant victims of the floods.

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South Africa's government has withdrawn a special Christmas postage stamp printed to aid children's homes. Dutch Reformed pastors have objected to the stamp because it showed the Virgin Mary with a halo and the Christ Child, with the cross of Lorraine in one corner. They called it "a camouflaged form of Catholic propaganda".

* *

The Roman Catholic Church in Munich has promised full support in practical arrangements for the Ninth German Evangelical Kirchentag, to be held in Munich from August 12 to 16, 1959. Local Catholics are offering housing for participants. The Kirchentag's organisers have promised similar support for the Munich Eucharistic Congress planned for 1960.

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The Council of the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD) has appointed a committee to prepare a statement on differing German attitudes to atomic armament for the next full synod of the EKD in 1960. The EKD Council met in West Germany for the first time for more than a year and was attended by its three East German members.

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Bishop Lajos Ordass, since vacating office as Bishop of the Southern Diocese of the Lutheran Church in Hungary, has been translating Scandinavian books into Hungarian. Pastor Tage Morsing of Denmark, who visited the bishop during a journey to Hungary, reports that he is translating a play called "The Idealist" by the Danish pastor-poet Kaj Munk, who was murdered by the Gestapo during the occupation of Denmark. Bishop Ordass does not at present exercise his right to speak and preach in Budapest.

EPS, Geneva

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The Council of the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD), meeting in Hanover, has expressed "grave concern" because the USSR's note on the status of Berlin might make it harder for Germans from East and West Germany to meet freely. The Council asked the churches to pray for the maintenance of peace and the unity of the Evangelical Church and the German people. EPS, Geneva

A Special ReportSwiss Debate on Atomic Arms Continues

(Bern) - A special meeting of the Swiss Protestant Federation has passed on to the Cantonal Swiss churches a report on the problem raised for Christians by the proposal to equip the Swiss army with atomic weapons.

A commission of ten theological professors, appointed six months ago to study the question, presented two sets of "theses", giving reasons for and against atomic equipment for defence. The commission was not unanimous and preferred to put the issues before the federation and the churches for further consideration.

All members of the special commission agreed that the invention of nuclear weapons puts the problem of war in a new light. They stressed the menace to the civil population and to future generations.

Neither of the two groups within the commission was prepared to advocate adoption of the weapons, but six members of the commission reaffirmed their "loyalty to the principle of national defence". They asked, "believing that Switzerland must remember its mission and its duties to other peoples", whether nuclear weapons can be used by the Swiss army, which, by its tradition, is purely for defence. They also ask whether atomic armament, under these circumstances, is necessary.

"But since we do not know what the position will be during the next few years", they continue, "we cannot definitely reject such weapons. However, we recognize that no permanent solution can be reached through a balance of armaments, any more than through 'nuclear pacifism'. We must therefore do everything possible to ensure real peace in the world."

The six theologians adopting this first position were Philippe Daulte, Karl Guggisberg, Victor Maag, Philippe Menoud, Eduard Schweitzer and Ernest Staehelin.

The four other members of the commission, Karl Barth, Jaques Courvoisier-Patry, Edmond Grin and Jean-Jacques Stamm said that "if national defence is envisaged in the form of nuclear warfare, it will expose our country to the gravest danger, which cannot be justified by speculations about the threat from the East. That is equally true of the distinction between 'tactical weapons' and 'strategic weapons'" according to the four theologians, who went on to say that "people who approve the small atom bomb today will find the same arguments tomorrow in favour of the big one, and will consider it 'absolutely essential' for the Swiss army to have nuclear weapons".

The second group in the commission concludes its statement by saying: "If the Christian faith represented by the Church has anything to contribute to this discussion - and it certainly has - it can say one thing and one only, that unconditional obedience to Jesus Christ makes it impossible for any Christian to participate actively in nuclear warfare or in preparations for it."

In introducing the debate, Professor Henri d'Espine spoke as president of the Swiss Protestant Federation's Council, together with Dr. Werner Kaegi, professor of International Law in the University of Zurich. Professor d'Espine said that the Church is always the place where brothers can listen to each other with respect based on mutual confidence, even when they differ, because they all want to submit to God's will.

EPS, Geneva

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WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES

COMMISSION ON FAITH AND ORDER

1959

WEEK OF PRAYER FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY

A Letter

In sending out once more these suggestions for the observance of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, the Faith and Order Department of the World Council of Churches expresses its desire to see this particular period become the focus point of continual and widespread prayer for unity. But comments which have reached the Faith and Order Committee suggest that two points should be made now, which may perhaps remove some uncertainties.

1. Confusion exists in some quarters between this Week of January 18th to 25th and a Week of Prayer earlier in January, promoted in many countries by the World's Evangelical Alliance. Enough to say that the two observances have widely different origins and purposes, but need not conflict in spirit or practice. The Evangelical Alliance is concerned with united prayer for the evangelization of the world. "Our Week" is concerned with prayer for unity. Unity and mission are so closely related that we ought to find no conflict in the spirit of the two weeks, though it must be admitted that this nearness does, in some quarters, create real problems of a practical and organizational kind. But these have to be sorted out at the local level.

2. Another confusion is between the observance of this Week in the spirit and approach associated with the name of the Abbé Couturier (whose outlook was one which the Faith and Order movement shared when it adopted the promotion of this Week in 1940) and an interpretation of it as prayer simply for the reconciliation of all the other Christians to the Roman Catholic Church. Of course, every Christian must have some conception of what he believes would be involved in our prayer for unity being answered. We know that there are many Christians who observe and advocate the Week of Prayer in the belief that it must be thus interpreted. But this knowledge need not for one moment hinder us from commending an observance of the Week which leaves the definition of it, in human words "that the visible unity of the Church of Christ may be accomplished according to His will and by the means that He wills".

That is the prayer which we would commend to all, as a prayer that may be made in complete sincerity and honesty, and in the faith that "the walls of our division do not reach up to heaven".

May the Holy Spirit of God teach us all to pray aright.

Yours in His fellowship,

Oliver Tomkins.

Chairman of the Working Committee
of Faith and Order

EPS, Geneva